

# **Sikhi(sm), Literature and Film**

**Surjit Kuljit Kaur Bindra**





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**Sponsored by the Surjit Kuljit Kaur Bindra Chair in  
Sikh Studies  
and the Department of Religion**

### **Panel 1: Narrative & History**

**Chair: Dr. Mandair, Respondent: Harjeet Grewal**

#### **1. “De-Categorizing Sikh Literature: Of Genres, Hagiographies, and Janamsakhis”**

**Simran Jeet Singh (Columbia University, NY)**

Recent studies of Sikh literature have been shaped by the categories they employ. Whether we speak of *bani* as scripture or *janamsakhi* as hagiography, the act of translating specific texts into western categories has substantially impacted the ways in which they have been received and interpreted. In this paper, I will interrogate two literary genres that have been deployed to organize early Sikh writings – *janamsakhi* and hagiography.

I will begin by focusing on key debates and methodological issues that relate to the category of “janamsakhi.” My analysis will juxtapose the three most commonly cited *janamsakhi* traditions (i.e., *Puratan*, *Bala*, *Miharban*), and I will seek to identify the continuities and disjunctures among these. In doing so, I will raise questions regarding the validity of “*janamsakhi*” as a unitary and stable category, and

I will also explore the ways in which the uncritical usage of this category problematizes our senses of early Sikh literature and history. Second, I will examine the broader category of “hagiography” by exploring the utilities and drawbacks of using this non-native genre to understand early modern South Asian writings. I will explore the assumptions implicit in this categorization, and I will delineate the ways in which the framework of “hagiography” has colored the readings of modern scholarship on South Asian biographical writings with specific reference to studies on *janamsakhis*. In problematizing and deconstructing the literary genres of *janamsakhi* and hagiography,

I hope to create a space for re-constructing new frameworks that account for various features of these writings (e.g., language, context of composition, purpose). I expect that this critical study will contribute significantly to our understandings and organizations of early Sikh literature and history.

## **2. “Bhai Jaita’s epic ‘*Sri Gur Kathā*’: A New Milestone in the Sikh Literatures”**

**Dr Raj Kumar Hans (The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Gujarat)**

It is one of strange ironies of the Sikh tradition that the otherwise vibrant scholarship on Sikh studies has hardly taken note of a magnificent text by Bhai Jaita (c.1661-1704), viz. *Sri Gur Katha*, even when it has been in the public domain for last few decades. This is a powerful and evocative epic around Guru Gobind Singh’s life which has potential of (un)settling important controversies generated by contentious

interpretations of Sikh tradition. Emanating from close quarters of guru- ghar, it wields the ring of proximity and authenticity to the central events to the Sikh tradition.

It emerges as the first source to talk explicitly about the 5Ks (*panj kakkars*), a detailed description of 'amrit bidhi' (*khande di pahu*) and 'rahit' as enunciated by the Tenth Master. Being the closest witness, it does not mention about 'Durga puja' while narrating the Khalsa event. Coming from a dalit Sikh (rechristened by Guru Gobind Singh as Jeevan Singh) in the lifetime of the Guru, it offers an unpolluted version of the central concerns of the Sikh tradition in general and the Khalsa tradition in particular as compared to the later brahmanical or brahmanised-Sikh interpolations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Written in the prevalent old Punjabi (*sadh bhasha*) of the Sikh tradition, 'Sri Gur Katha' is a testimony of Bhai Jaita as a master poet besides an accomplished warrior. The paper proposes to analyze *Sri Gur Katha* in the broader context of Sikhi and historiographical praxis.

### **3. "Negotiating human agency in Puran Singh's mystical vision"**

**Prabhsharandeep Singh (University of Oxford, England)**

One way that Puran Singh resolves this tension in his writing is by renouncing the individual's own will or effort in favor of dedicating him or herself to an Enlightened master, or a Sant. The notion of human agency in the form of a Sant becomes a medium for resolving the tension. Throughout the course of Puran Singh's own intellectual and spiritual journey,

human agencies have played a significant role in his life, have given shape to Puran Singh's own spiritual trajectory and, as a result, have influenced the impetus and motivation of his writing.

While the figure of the Sant, or spiritual master, is prominent in Puran Singh's writings, it is often accompanied by ambiguity. His writing often prompts one to ask: 'What is the status of the Sant in this work? Is the Sant an abstract entity that the individual evokes from within? Does the Sant actually exist in the form of a human agency? Through a reading Puran Singh's poetry, I will suggest that the writing does not proffer a definitive answer, and it argues for the very ambiguity itself.

## **Panel 2: Diaspora & Politics**

**Chair Dr. Hans, Respondent: Dr. Nijhawan**

### **4. “Beyond Secular Apologetics”**

**Dr. Arvind Mandair (University of Michigan, USA)**

### **5. “History and Fiction in Shauna Singh Baldwin”**

**Najnin Islam (Jadavpur University; University of Pennsylvania, PA)**

The history of the Sikh community in India is dotted with some of the most brutal episodes in contemporary times. These events remain well documented and extensively commented upon. As a student of literature I am interested to see how historical moments inform and shape fictional narratives about the Sikh community. I want to explore the confluence of history and memory in the writings of Shauna Singh Baldwin. Focusing on some of Singh Baldwin's short- stories in *English Lessons and other Stories* and *We are not in Pakistan* I intend to see how she intertwines reminiscences of crucial historical events like the Partition, the 1984 Delhi riots in framing her narratives, set in contemporary times in locales ranging across the globe.

Through close reading of stories like ‘Montreal 1962’, ‘This Distance Between Us’, ‘Family Ties’ among others I wish to analyze how multiple time frames are juxtaposed within these fictional canvasses in order to delineate a sense of Sikh identity both within India and in the diaspora. What ramifications do these events have in consolidating a certain manner of



performing a Sikh identity? Do they acquire any added significance in the context of the diaspora? Laterally, it will be fruitful to examine how notions of gender inform this construction. Taking cognizance of Baldwin's female characters would help put into perspective the way Sikh women have responded to these crucial historical events and the manner in which they have responded to the exigencies of 'performing' their ethno-religious identities.

## **6. "Framing Sikhs as Other: Literary Representations and Discursive Limits"**

**Dr. Parvinder Mehta (Davenport University, Livonia, MI)**

The creative representations of Sikhs through fiction and other literary arts reveal a complex framework of strategic reflections, recognition, even misrecognition at times, and sheer obscurantism at other. In many works from the last century, Sikhs have been either objectified merely as the most exotic form of an Indian devoid of any agency, or in other cases, Sikh men have been drawn as hyper masculine, demonic, violent dark men.

The discursive limits of Sikh representation, presence and absence, recall the cultural analyses offered by Edward Said, Stuart Hall, Frantz Fanon, Foucault and Homi Bhabha, among many others and enable us to understand a neo-Orientalist rhetoric whereby Sikhs are displaced or assimilated, if not betrayed through creative representations. At times when Sikh subjects, both male and female, are offered tangible representations, they are portrayed as an ethnicity on margins struggling with identity conflicts, and

burdened by history, violence, trauma and memory. This paper will examine critical nuances and strategies for representing Sikhs by contemporary writers of the Indian/Asian diaspora including, Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, Gautam Malkani, Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Divakurni, and Shauna Singh Baldwin and unveil the implications of Sikh ethnicity on margins in selected works.

## **7. “The Past and Present of the Diasporic Subject” Dr. Anne Murphy (University of British Columbia, BC)**

The Punjabi language literary environment of British Columbia is vibrant, and stories written here uniquely express both interests in South Asia (particularly in India) and local concerns. This paper will address how diaspora is configured as subject, both in the sense of topic and as a form of subjectivity, in new narrative writing from the Punjabi-Canadian diaspora. We address several works by Sikh authors, but not exclusively, as a means to appreciate what is both Sikh and non- Sikh about such writing, to excavate an ethos of the diasporic subject as expressed in these works.

We start with the stories in the landmark collection “*kathā kaneḍa*,” and then briefly examine two new novels by two prominent Sikh authors from greater Vancouver—*Vigocā*, by Jarnail Singh Sekha and *Spaunsarship* (or, *Sponsorship*) by Kalwant Parmar “Nadim”—as well as the novel *Skeena*, by Pakistani-Punjabi author Fauzia Rafique (also from the Vancouver area), which has been published in three mutually created (rather than translated) versions:

**Gurmukhi Punjabi, Shahmukhi Punjabi, and English. We examine these works to discern their temporal, spacial, and linguistic dimensions: the dynamics of the negotiation of “non-English” (within a larger politics of vernacular-ity in South Asia and beyond) with reference to space and time, and the continuing presence of the past in the present, a sensibility of both loss and gain, presence and absence.**

**The way in which personal and community history are articulated in the novels suggests new ways of thinking about the diasporic subject as a topic and choice, and how the past impinges on the present-making project. We also explore the degree to which such engagements with the past and present reflect a particular preserve of Punjabi language material, as compared to comparable literary production in English.**

### **Panel 3: Dastar & Fine Arts**

**Chair: Dr. Chanda, Respondent: Dr. Murphy**

#### **8. “Masculinity, Migration and Shifting Meanings of the Sikh Hair and Turban in Contemporary Punjab”**

**Dr. Harjant Singh Gill (Towson University, MD)**

In this presentation, I explore the shifting meanings of the turban among young Sikh men living in Chandigarh, the capital of Punjab. The majority of them migrate from rural villages seeking education and employment opportunities. Either before or upon migrating, these young men cut off their hair, though they continue wearing the turban intermediately. Where as these men regard uncut hair (traditionally an essential element of Sikhism) as antiquated and as inconvenience, they also recognize that the turban distinguishes them as macho, and as belonging to the land-owning castes.

Hence, in contemporary discourse, the turban attains a flexible quality. By wearing the turban, they can adhere to cultural traditions when required, as well as claim the power and privilege associated with it. Yet not having to wear the turban all the time allows them to assimilate into the urban landscapes of rapidly globalizing India. Using interview I conducted making a documentary on the topic of hair and turban in Sikhism (titled *Roots of Love*), I unpack the complexities of gender, representation and how it is influenced by migration.

## **9. “Punjabi Theatre: Spaces, Icons and Culture”**

**Dr. Gunjeet Aurora (School of Liberal Studies,  
Ambedkar University, Delhi)**

Punjabi theatre, which started with the encouragement of Norah Richards, has traversed various genres and styles which have been dominated by iconic theatre personalities such as Gursharan Singh, Atamjit Singh, Balwant Gargi, Neelam Mansingh etc. The themes have been varied ranging from the trauma of the Partition, the folk legends and stories, the social reality and the rural scape of Punjab.

My paper focuses on Punjabi theatre and its growth and presence in the socio-cultural space of modern Punjab through a study of the different aspects and directions in contemporary Punjabi theatre. Apart from the thematic concern, there is the overarching question of ‘spaces’ for theatre in the Indian cultural sphere where despite the rich diversity of folk theatre which is thriving in smaller towns and rural centres, the urban/metropolitan Indian theatre is often caught up in its lament for the lack of space for theatre and the lack of audience mostly because of the ‘other’ theatre i.e. the movie theatre. In Punjab, University campuses, Tagore theatre in Chandigarh have often been the hubs of theatre productions, which points to the lack of actual theatre spaces in Punjab. However the success of Manch Rangmanch in Amritsar which has successfully been able to create a space for socially relevant theatre in Punjab points to a possible model for the creation of new theatre spaces.

My paper will therefore also deal with the issue of performance and performance spaces in order to situate Punjabi theatre, within the broader theoretical field of performance/theatre studies.

#### **10. “Visual Cultures: Museum Exhibitions”**

**Satwinder Kaur Bains (Director, Centre for Indo Canadian Studies, University of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford, BC, Canada)**

This paper discusses the development of the Sikh Heritage Museum and the mediums decided upon for heritage access to the Sikh community and the larger community. One of only three museums dedicated to Sikh heritage in Canada, this museum is housed in a National Historic Site (and the oldest Sikh temple in the Americas – 100 years old) in Abbotsford, BC, Canada. The development of the Museum has been a true cross-cultural community encounter and collaborative effort. This paper outlines the unique and multi-faceted approach to its development of replacing and repositioning it as a public cultural, historical, heritage, and religious space.

Ronald Barthes famous work *Mythologies*, exposes the parallel between the brain's private memory and cultural history and the public memory and cultural history of the museum. “It parodies the Cartesian disembodiment by exposing the absurdity of disconnecting the brain's and museums intellectual operations from the larger contexts of the human body and body politic”. This Sikh Heritage Museum introduces the community to archival materials that include pioneer voices/digital recordings, archival documents/recordings/film and artefacts, as well as

**photos and exhibits, stories that have been previously untold, unheard or unseen.**

**The archive is positioned as a site of renewal and rebirth...the tension is in its initial expression as a project of retrievalism – as Foucault makes explicit 'to write was to return'. To attend to the hybridity of historical consciousness for immigrant groups also raises questions about the relationships amongst history, memory, myth and fantasy. Questions also abound about what is collective about collective memory? As Olick asks "Can we have an aggregation of socially framed individual memories as we refer to the collective phenomena sui generis"?**

## **Panel 4: Film & Cinema**

**Chair: Dr. Aurora, Respondent: Dr. Hans**

### **11. "Cinema, Nihilism and the Question of the Malaised-being"**

**Prabhsharanbir Singh (University of British Columbia, BC, Canada)**

Understanding literature as the exteriorization of imaginative and fantasmatic layers of being in the form of words, I would argue that the advent of Cinematic rendering of man's creative impulses is a mutational step in the fundamental structures of the materialization of literary impulse whereby this impulse is brought to its peak as well as transformed beyond recognition.

I would argue that the movement of literary impulse towards its own exteriorization and materialization is blasphemous in nature. Blasphemous not in the context of a particular religious tradition but in violating 'the sacred law of life' (*hukam*). *Gurbani* is not literature as it does not exteriorize and materialize the imaginative and fantasmatic layer of being but an experiential one. Its status as a living *Guru* also adds a unique dimension which is entirely missing in literature. Cinema as an *industrial temporal object*, Bernard Stiegler argues, is one of 'the new century's determining elements'.

It has conjured up a massive temporal co-incidence (whereby millions and sometimes billions of people watch something on their screens unfold simultaneously) which not only gives rise to 'event's new structure' but also commands 'new forms of



consciousness and collective unconsciousness' which correspond to it. He further argues that this interruption of collective consciousness and unconsciousness have resulted in a state of malaised-being (*mal-être*). Mass production of industrial temporal objects and its control by the ruthless market forces is causing a fundamental disorientation and decadence of not only our modern socio-political organization, but also of our subjective states in the form of *mal-être*. Taking my clues from these insights,

I would argue that Sikhs' lack of literary canon and especially cinema (presuming that Sikhs do lack a proper literary or cinematic tradition or possess only a nascent literary/cinematic tradition which is not as developed as for example Persian, European or Hindu traditions) is positive. Positive in the sense that due to this lack, Sikhs did not contributed or contributed far less in perpetuating the processes which are resulting in 'the malaise of being'. But tragically, they are the ones who are suffering most from these processes. With the advent of British colonialism and the rise of the Indian nation-state, collective consciousness and historical memory of Sikhs have been brutally disfigured. *Sangat*, and institutions such as *Akal Takht*, which were crucial in the development of Sikhs' *collective psycho-spiritual individuation*, have been rendered utterly dysfunctional due to political oppression. I would argue that live performance of *Kirtan* in the presence of *Guru Granth Sahib*, has a totally unique structure as an event and a reinvention of the tradition of *Sangat* can contribute towards *collective psycho-spiritual individuation* of Sikhs. *Kirtan* is the site where 'malaised-beings' get cured and a new being gets minted.

## **12. “Recognition and Rejection of Sikh Identity in Film”**

**Dr. Geetanjali Singh Chanda (Women’s, Gender & Sexuality Studies Program, Yale University, USA)**

Two pivotal moments in Indian history continue to shape the Sikh identity. The trauma, of partition in 1947 and the riots of 1984, resonate with Sikh communities across generations. The partition of India and Pakistan led to the displacement of huge populations and brutal communal violence. Later, in 1984 Delhi erupted in anti-Sikh riots following the killing of prime minister Indira Gandhi.

Both events forced Sikhs to recognize - and then negotiate - their religious-cultural identities. In some cases, this led to an outright rejection of religion by some Sikhs while in others it encouraged a process of self discovery. Questions of what it means to be a Sikh, especially at such critical junctures of national, community and personal trauma become particularly poignant. Indian popular cinema has chronicled the wrenching Partition story, however, the Sikh story has been largely elided. In most accounts, it is the experiences of male Sikhs, the most readily identifiable members of their community, that have dominated subsequent artistic narratives.

By contrast, the perspectives of women have been less prominent. Due, in no small measure, to patriarchal society and to their lack of distinguishing identity markers as signaled by the beards and turbans of their male counterparts. Women, both during partition and the 1984 riots, sought the safety of community promised by religious identity, but often found themselves silenced and marginalized.

Oral histories like Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* and Ritu Menon's *Borders and Boundaries* revealed, enriched and problematized the discourse surrounding modern India's origins and ideology of secularism from a gendered perspective. Similarly a number of recent independent films, particularly 'Khamosh Paani' and 'Amu' among others, provide an entry point into understanding this important but underrepresented female viewpoint in the world of cinema.

### **13. "Representation of Sikhs in Bollywood Cinema"** **Dr. Anjali Roy (Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, India)**

Like other ethnic minorities, Sikhs have been conventionally represented in popular Hindi cinema either as brave warriors or as uncouth rustics. In the nationalist text in which the imagined subject was an urban North Indian, Hindu male, Sikh characters were displaced and made to provide comic relief. Since the mid-1990s, Hindi filmmakers have genuflected to the rising economic and political power of the Sikh diaspora through token inclusions of Sikhs. Although 1990s films like *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998) included attractive images of Sikhs, Hindi cinema could introduce a Sikh protagonist only in the new millennium in *Ghadar: Ek Prem Katha* (2001) and feature a turbaned Sikh as a protagonist only two decades later in the film *Singh is King* (2009). Ever since the film became a superhit, top Bollywood stars such as Akshay Kumar, Saif Ali Khan, Ranbir Kapoor and even Rani Mukherjee have played Sikh characters in films like *Love Aaj Kal* (2009), *Rocket Singh*:

*Salesman of the Year*(2009) and *Dil Bole Hadippa*(2009).

Even though Bollywood stars have donned the turban to turn Sikh cool, Sikhs view the representation of the community in Hindi cinema as demeaning and have attempted to revive the Punjabi film industry as an attempt at authentic self-representation. This paper examines images of Sikhs in new Bollywood films to inquire if the romanticization of Sikhs as representing rustic authenticity makes good business sense given the increasing power of the Sikh diaspora or is an indulgence in diasporic technonostalgia through which the Sikh body becomes the site for non-technologized rusticity. It argues that despite the exoticization of Sikhs in the new Bollywood film, the Sikh subject continues to be displaced in the Indian nation.

## **Panel 5: Internet & Rap**

**Chair: Dr. Nijhawan, Respondent: Dr. Roy**

### **14. “Wounds through Websites: Virtual Commemoration and the Sikh Diaspora”**

**Shruti Devgan (Department of Sociology, Rutgers University, NJ)**

My paper explores some emerging themes from my interviews with Sikh immigrants in their role as ‘memory-workers,’ and initiators of transnational social movements around minority identity and justice. I am focusing on Internet websites that diasporic Sikhs are using as a medium to revisit two ‘cultural traumas’ in particular: the partition of 1947 and the anti-Sikh violence of 1984. There are several discontinuities between the events of 1947 and 1984, but the common thread binding the two events is the official denial of the extent and nature of violence, loss, and trauma. Sikh immigrants are actively and deliberately engaged in addressing the official disengagement and neglect around these events through several ways including the construction of websites.

I am conducting 45-50 interviews with members of the Sikh diaspora across generations in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. In my paper, I will discuss findings from 20-25 interviews with Sikhs across generations and gender and discuss their role in initiating and furthering processes of commemoration. I will use the case study of Sikhs to understand how immigrant contexts contain

conditions to revisit painful pasts and redress past wrongs. I will also discuss the role of emotions in creating commemorative websites, a theme that has hitherto been neglected in the sociology of commemoration.

### **15. “The Warriors of Goja: Performance and Representation of Sikh Masculinity and Religiosity” Natasha Raheja (Anthropology, NYU)**

In November 2011, a video entitled [Warriors of Goja](#) went viral, quickly acquiring over 1,600,000 hits on Youtube. Originally aired as part of an episode of *Adhurs: The Ultimate Talent Show*, produced by a major Indian satellite network, this video showcases an item comprised of 15 Sikh men, dressed in black muscle shirts and camouflage pants, performing a wide variety of masochistic acts, sometimes chewing glass, running each other over with cars, smashing one another with sledge hammers, and breaking boards over bodies, all to the upbeat tune of bhangra music and against the projection of a Khanda in the background. In a final act of assertion, these men raise an Indian flag as the audience bursts into applause.

The pretty female judge announces that the Warriors of Goja are also the Warriors of India and have won our hearts, the show’s title, and 300,000 Indian Rupees. Generating over 2000 comments and provoking coverage across several prominent media outlets, the Warriors of Goja offer us a productive space to consider popular performances and representations of Sikh masculinity and their range of reception both within and outside of the Sikh community. How is Sikh masculinity constructed in

contrast to Indian, ostensibly Hindu, femininity? Are these men heroes? Comics? Sell-outs? How does the variation in reception, as evinced by a diverse array of readings, confound the staticity of “Sikh community” and “Sikhism” as analytics? Given the doctrinal material expression of Sikh identity, how does any act by a visually marked Sikh person have the potential to be read as religious? Some responses to the video describe the performance as an expression of a martial arts practice, known as *gatka* or *shastar vidya*. Interestingly, the virality of this video coincides with recent initiatives from within the Sikh community to revive *gatka* as a Sikh martial art. How might the contestation around this video correspond to a lack of consensus as to the revival and recreation of this practice?

Examining dialogues around the *Warriors of Goja*, and the performance itself, my paper aims to further develop and explore the questions raised above. I hope to situate this project within larger inquiries on the circulation of Sikh religious images in transnational, global media networks.

**16. “From *Balle-Balle* to Yo-Yo: Analysing Punjabi Rap and Hip-Hop as the new Expressions of Contemporary Punjabi Youth”**  
**Bijay Mehta (AIHC, Calcutta University)**

Punjab and Punjabi music have always been associated with the robust energy of Bhangra or ‘*balle-balle*’. However it might be erroneous today to term Punjab and Punjabi music as being synonymous with each other because with the passage of time, the global appeal of Punjab music has opened itself to

fusion with various other genres of music and has also been experimental enough to incorporate and assimilate more aggressive counter-cultural music forms within itself. Added to this is the explosion in the number of Punjabi channels which have provided the impetus for the growth of different kinds of musical infusions like Hip-Hop, Rap, Reggae etc in Punjabi music. Punjabi music and videos embed many elements of popular culture which have crept in youth culture ranging from social networking sites to techno- gadgets to an inordinate amount of emphasis on aggression, violence, gun-culture, religion and identity. Interestingly while Black rap emerged as a counter-culture with a certain history of violence, race conflict and identity struggle behind it, the same cannot be said for the rise of Punjabi rap which depicts an equal amount of violence and aggression.

My paper looks at these themes and issues which render contemporary Punjabi music open to popular culture analysis. It also contrasts the present popular Punjabi music with the traditional and more conventional popular folk music of Punjab *vis-a-vis* the content, the musical forms, the production and presentation aspect of the music by focusing and showcasing the works of artists such as Kuldeep Manak, Chamkila, Yamla Jatt, Gurdas Mann etc and contemporary artists like Yo Yo Honey Singh, Gippy Grewal, Satinder Sartaj.

### **17. “Hip Hop Vaar”**

**Harjeet Singh Grewal (University of Michigan)**

This paper engages with recent uses of hip-hop music in conjunction with Dhadi Vaars. It will use two recent discussions by Brian Keith Axel as well as an essay by



Kalra & Nijhawan to explore some of the implications of this recent deployment of musicality by Sikhs. I would like to leap into a discussion of how the presencing found in the audio recordings and YouTube Videos is best understood through the armour of psychoanalytic clashes as represented by Freud's primal horde and putative narratives of resistance to such clashes. Recent uses of violence and suppression of liberty in multicultural societies involves a project of creating a modern subject which can be seen to be described in the notions of neurosis and psychosis in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. What I will attempt to show is how events of suppression become sublimated and condensed with nuanced meanings through the hybridization of form and historicity in the combination of hip-hop and the dhadi vaar. This is an excessive outpouring which exceeds anything which resembles a motive by those who create or circulate the music. It stands as against the state's epistemic drive which seeks to domesticate resistance by creating a kind of permanent virulent form of sublimation.

Ultimately, the creation of a tolerant society through the mitigation and then erasure of distinctions between groups is desired. This ideal melds with modern understandings of Sikh history in interpretations of the Khalsa ideal. However, I will argue for the possibilities in interpreting this musical form as one which speaks against phenomenon of Freud's mass psychology. Such moments then also offer an opportunity to reflect upon the vitality of the Khalsa ideal for expressions of radical sovereignty and human potential. In order to show this, I will also attempt to demonstrate that the two apparently distinct paradigms of traditional dhadi music as

expressions of religious fundamentalism and Diasporic urban licentious hip-hop culture are perhaps not as dissonant as they may at first appear; they are perhaps linked by a mutual framing of resistance to dominance and domestication –a mutual struggle to survive, to have sustenance, while balancing a logic of equivalence with a logic of alterity.

This stance allows for their mutual deployment in videos that seek to memorialize *shaheeds*. This desire to project the body of the *shaheed* is itself commensurate with the mode of storytelling and historicity that seeks to preserve the name and the actions of a formative event in the creation of a subjugated Sikh object. This radical object is haunted by lost sovereignty but through a kind of psychosis participates in the equivocating logic of mass formation of which can be seen as a European harbinger.

#### **18. FEMALE VOICES IN GURBĀNĪ SANGĪT AND THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN PROMOTING FEMALE KĪRTANĪE**

**Francesca Cassio**

*Sardarni Harbans Kaur Chair in Sikh Musicology,  
Hofstra University*

The paper is focused on an interesting literary aspect that I have already analyzed in my Phd, after 5 years of fieldwork in India. In particular I'm referring to the poetry that has been set to music (from *dhrupad* to *thumri* and *Gurbani*). In such repertoires, to express the analogy of the relationship between God and the humankind, the 'poet' writes with a 'female voice' although the author of the compositions is a male. In

**the particular case of Gurbani, this female 'voice' used in literature is in total contrast with the reality. Social norms in fact banned women from singing and performing in the Golden Temple, as well as as performing professionally and regularly in Gurudwara-s.**

**The contemporary generations complain about this disparity in terms of education (women do not have the same training) and achievements.**